

Virginia Bluebells by hippocampers

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Summary:

Hopper finds her fast asleep, surrounded by wildflowers and dew-kissed grass. For a moment, his heart stops; she looks dead. He thinks he is going to have to carry the burden of another dead daughter – he knows, deep down, that in his caring for this girl, he has begun to feel the way he did for Sarah, no matter how hard he fights it.

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Eleven returns at the beginning of Spring. Hopper rescues her, and it appears Eleven is also rescuing him.

Virginia Bluebells

Eleven returns on the first day of Spring. The veil between the Upside Down and the Right Side Up has been getting thinner and thinner for a while now. Frequently, Eleven is able to catch glimpses of the true world if she stays near to Hopper's food-box on the other side. As the veil thins, her visions become stronger and more frequent, and Eleven knows it is time to leave. Just as pale bluebells start to bloom, she seizes her chance. Despite the barrier's weakness, it takes all of her focus to break through. Blood drips from her nose and ears, staining her dress and blurring her vision. But she succeeds, and awakes to find herself flat on her back on the forest floor. Sunlight peeps through gaps in the trees, dappling her face in the pale morning light. The flowers she has been watching grow for months surround her head. There is no ectoplasmic matter, no putrid smells, no soul-destroying darkness. This is the right world. Joy stirs in her stomach, though she is too weak to act upon it just yet. She doesn't think anyone will mind if she naps here for a little while. After all, she deserves it.

It is not long before her presence is discovered. Hopper finds her fast asleep, surrounded by wildflowers and dew-kissed grass. For a moment, his heart stops; she looks dead. Expression calmer than he's ever seen it and skin ashen from exhaustion, Hopper thinks he is going to have to carry the burden of another dead daughter – he knows, deep down, that in his caring for this girl, he has begun to feel the way he did for Sarah, no matter how hard he fights it. Barely breathing, he crouches, reaching out a hand to touch her cheek. To his shock, she is warm, and his touch startles her awake. Instantly defensive, Eleven scrambles away from her touch, before returning to herself and blinking slowly at Hopper. He tries a smile.

"Well, hello there. Good of you to drop by."

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It takes a while before Hopper can gain the trust of the little girl laying prone on the forest floor before him. He slowly edges closer, and extends a hand to her, talking to her about mundane things the whole time. It seems to calm her down a little, and eventually, she

reaches out, placing her small hand in his. It disturbs Hopper, to see how thin she is – Eleven’s arms are almost bird-like, and shake with the effort of moving towards him. He gently runs a thumb across her knuckles, the way he used to when Sarah was sleeping in her hospital bed, equally tiny and frail.

“Let’s get you out of the cold, kiddo,” he murmurs, standing. He reaches to lift her, but pauses upon seeing her eyes widen in terror. “It’s alright. Can I lift you? You don’t look up to the walk home.”

Eleven looks at him for a long time. He waits, an uncharacteristic patience overcoming him. It feels like hours before she speaks.

“Yes.”

Permission granted, Hopper bends and lifts her up, bridal style. He wants to curse upon feeling how little she weighs, wants to hold her closer to keep her as warm as possible. But he doesn’t, because he feels like that would be crossing a boundary not yet established. So he just holds her as he walks back to his small home, praying silently that nobody sees him on the walk back.

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When Eleven wakes again, she is not on the forest floor, but in a bed. It’s soft, and a hell of a lot warmer than her makeshift shelter in the Upside Down, though the blanket that covers her is a little worn and ratty. She tries to push herself up, but her arms collapse beneath her, and she lets out a small cry of shock when her head hits the pillow.

In seconds, the chief of police appears in the doorway, a paternal expression of concern gracing his face briefly, before he catches himself and schools his features back to his more usual gruff expression.

“Afternoon,” Hopper says, and Eleven blinks. “Hungry?”

Almost on cue, her stomach growls, and Eleven nods eagerly. Hopper smiles just slightly, before crossing the room and carefully helping her sit, propping her up on pillows to stop her falling back down again.

“I’ll go fetch you some lunch, kid. I got tuna sandwiches and that’s it, so that’s what you’re having. That ok?”

Eleven doesn’t know what tuna is, but she’s pretty sure she’d eat anything right now, so she nods and says “Thank you,” in a wisp of a voice that sounds nothing like her own.

While Hopper returns to the kitchen, Eleven takes the opportunity to look around the room she woke up in. It’s plain, really – no pictures on the walls or bedside table, like the ones in Mike’s room, and no personal touches, like the music box in Nancy’s. The blankets on the bed provide the only colour there, a worn blue checkered thing with holes in the corner. Eleven tugs it closer around her, appreciating the warmth it brings. The blue reminds her slightly of the flowers that surrounded her when she awoke earlier today. It makes her smile.

Hopper returns, carrying a plate and a glass of juice. He sets the juice down on the bedside table, and passes the plate to Eleven, who immediately begins to wolf the sandwich down as quickly as she is able. He chuckles softly.

“You were real hungry, huh? I’ve got more, don’t make yourself sick, now.”

Eleven seems to ignore him and carries on eating it like a starving dog. When she finishes the sandwich and down the juice, the girl seems a little lost. Hopper feels lost too. He’s never found a telepathic kid asleep in the forest after being trapped in another dimension before. He’s not sure there’s a guide book for this, either. They look at each other, and Hopper feels that frustratingly familiar paternal instinct stirring in his chest again. He offers her a gruff smile.

“So. Guess you’re stuck with me for now, kiddo. Hope that’s alright.”

The girl is looking at him again, eyes tired and face gaunt. But slowly, she returns his smile, and reaches out to touch his hand, the way she had in the forest.

“Yes. Stuck here is okay.”

It’s not much, but for the first time in a long time, Hopper doesn’t

feel guilt at the vague sense of happiness rising inside him. Once again, he is reminded that the world is a lot lighter when you can make a lost little girl smile.

Author's Note:

I might add more to this later, should I feel like it. The writing style is a bit different to my previous ones, I think? I'm working on being more "show, don't tell" with my writing. It takes more time and effort than I thought!

As ever, I can be found on [tumblr](#). Your comments always make me happy, and I'm also looking for prompts since I miss writing but don't know what you guys want to read. Much love <3

(Also, a little note to a commenter on my previous fic "Label", who just called themselves 'FUCK'. I don't know who you are because it's an anonymous username, but if you're reading this, I hope you're doing ok, and the option to talk is always open.)